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ABSTRACT

This report describes the results of a field test of "Federalism", a program from "The U.S. Constitution", an instructional video program series for secondary school students developed by the Agency for Instructional Technology (AIT) in association with Project '87. The participants of the preview are teachers and students in middle, junior high, and high schools in Illinois and Indiana. The teachers' responses are favorable to the video's content, the narration by William Moyers, and its appropriateness for grades 7-12. While the students' responses are favorable, they reacted negatively to the video's animation segments citing them as hard to understand and the documentary narration as boring. AIT feels that the students found the dramatic segments so compelling that this compensated for the students' negative reactions to the animation and documentary segments. The appendices include: (1) a list of participating schools; (2) the student questionnaire with responses in percentiles; (3) the teacher responses with tabulated responses; and (4) the discussion questions. (DJC)

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Number 99

# *The U.S. Constitution*: an Evaluation of the 'Federalism' Program

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July 1987

SO 019 328

Research Report #99

# *The U.S. Constitution*: An Evaluation of the 'Federalism' Program

July 1987

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# Executive Summary

This report describes the results of a field test of "Federalism," a program from ***The U.S. Constitution***, an instructional video series for students in junior and senior high school. Currently under development by the Agency for Instructional Technology and a consortium of state and provincial education agencies in association with Project '87, ***The U.S. Constitution*** will be available in September 1987.

Students and teachers reacted positively to "Federalism." Teachers indicated that the content was appropriate for their students and thought it would appeal to them. They said they were excited at the prospect of having such high quality materials on the Constitution available this fall. Several teachers commented that they were especially impressed with the documentary section and with Bill Moyers as the narrator.

The students said their favorite part of the program was the dramatic segment; their least favorite parts were the animation and narration segments. Some called Bill Moyers "boring." Students liked the way the program presented a constitutional issue in a story to which they could relate. Most enjoyed the drama, although a few students commented that they thought the example was "too dramatic."

In general, the classes that viewed this program were very favorably impressed with it. Students said that programming such as "Federalism" would definitely make learning about the Constitution more meaningful and interesting. Teachers commented that there is a great need for such high quality materials on the Constitution. Without exception, the teachers who viewed "Federalism" were enthusiastic about it.

# Background

***The U.S. Constitution*** project was begun in 1980. AIT, in association with Project '87 (a joint activity of the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association), initiated needs assessment activities, textbook reviews, and evaluation of existing audiovisual materials. The culmination of this preliminary work was a prospectus titled *A Video Project to Increase Understanding of the United States Constitution for Junior and Senior High School* (September 1985). The overall goals of the project, as set forth in the prospectus, are "to increase appreciation and understanding of the U.S. Constitution, to show recurring constitutional issues in historical context, and to motivate critical thinking about such recurring issues."

The final version of the instructional design was completed in April 1986. The design document consists of content specifications for six programs. Scripting of the programs began in the summer of 1986. Scripts for all programs were reviewed by consortium representatives and classroom teachers. The first script sent to the consortium for review was "Federalism: Balance of Power Between National and State Governments" (October 1986).

A preliminary version of "Federalism" was taken to classrooms for evaluation during the first week of May 1987. Evaluators collected data from students and teachers (1) by observing them while they viewed the video, (2) from post-viewing questionnaires, and (3) from post-viewing classroom discussion. The remainder of this report is a summary of these data.

# Sample

A total of 183 students viewed the video. Table 1 describes the sample by sex; table 2 gives the frequency distribution by grade level.

**Table 1**

| | |
|---|---|
| Male | 44% |
| Female | 54% |
| No response | 2% |

**Table 2**

| | |
|---|---|
| Grade 7 | 16% |
| Grade 9 | 19% |
| Grade 10 | 28% |
| Grade 11 | 12% |
| Grade 12 | 16% |
| No response | 9% |

The students were from four schools in Illinois and Indiana. (Appendix A)

Monticello High School is located in a small agricultural community in north-central Illinois. The 545 students enrolled there come from predominantly middle-income agricultural backgrounds. There also is a communication cable industry in town.

Urbana Junior High is located in Champaign/Urbana, Illinois, where the University of Illinois is the primary employer. A broad mix of ethnic groups and socioeconomic levels is present in the student body. The largest minority group is black, comprising 10 percent of the students. A number of foreign students are children of students or instructors at the university.

Columbia Middle School is a "magnet school" for the same area; students from the entire city can choose to attend this school. The socioeconomic makeup of the student body is similar to that of the students at Urbana Junior High.

The fourth school included in the evaluation was Columbus North High School, in Columbus, Indiana. Several major corporations, including Arvin Industries and Cummins Engine, have plants in Columbus. The three classes visited included students from all socioeconomic and ability levels; most of the students were in the "middle" socioeconomic level and of "average" ability.

# Methodology

Each classroom visit consisted of several parts: introduction and pre-viewing discussion, actual viewing, post-viewing questionnaire, and post-viewing discussion.

The opening discussion explained the purpose of the visit and encouraged students to be honest in their comments about the video. Evaluators attempted to make the students feel at ease and to create a comfortable atmosphere for discussion by asking such questions as: "What TV shows do you enjoy watching?" "What does a television critic do?" and "What do you think our [the evaluators'] job is?"

During the viewing of the video, students' reactions were carefully recorded. Evaluators attempted to make themselves unobtrusive while taking note of how students responded to the program. (Did they appear interested in the program? Were they bored? Did they laugh at particular parts?)

Next, both students and teachers were asked to complete questionnaires. Questions 1-8 of the student questionnaire (Appendix B) concentrated on general appeal; questions 9-11, on content. The teacher questionnaire (Appendix C) asked questions on general appeal, instructional effectiveness, and the program's expected outcomes.

In the post-viewing discussion (Appendix D), students were asked both appeal and content questions: "How did you like the program?" "What did you like the most about the program?" "What did you like the least about the program?" and "What did you think the main idea of the program was?" Students were encouraged to elaborate on their responses; also, appropriate follow-up questions were asked: "Why didn't you like the documentary segments?" "What would you suggest to make the accident scene more realistic?" Finally, students were asked, "If you could talk to the producer, what suggestions would you make?"

# Student Questionnaire Data

See Appendix B for a summary of students' responses to the questionnaire. Questions 1-3 assessed the appeal of the program to students. Table 3 summarizes these results.

**Table 3: Overview of Responses to Questions 1-3**

| | "Strongly Agree" | "Agree" |
|---|---|---|
| Question 1 ("Interesting?") | 15% | 76% |
| Question 2 ("Appealing?") | 14% | 60% |
| Question 3 ("Liked it?") | 19% | 61% |

As Table 3 demonstrates, the program was appealing to almost all the students. What segments were most appealing to them? Twenty-four percent of the students responding to question 7 said they liked all parts of the program. Responses to questions 7 and 8 indicate that students liked the dramatization best and the documentary and animation segments least. Evaluators' observations reinforce this finding.

As for content, over half (60%) answered that the Supreme Court settles disagreements between the federal government and a state government. Nearly everyone (83%) responded that the Civil War strengthened the federal government's power.

Different segments of the program seem to transmit mixed messages about who has the most power. The documentary segments on the Depression and Civil Rights emphasize the power of the federal government, while the dramatic situation emphasizes the power of the states. Students' responses reflect this mixed message: 39% said the federal government has the most power, 30% answered that power is shared by federal and state governments, and 21% said the state government has the most power.

Chi square comparisons of sex and grade by all items were made. No significant differences were found on any item according to grade or sex.

# Teacher Questionnaire Data

All nine teachers who viewed the Federalism program were impressed with it (see Appendix C for frequencies). The teachers' comments were similar to students' responses to the question, "What did you like the most about the program?" (See the "Classroom Discussion" section of this report.) For example, one teacher wrote, "I think the program really captured the attention of the students by giving personal, realistic, and relevant situations." Another teacher responded, "The using of young people in situations that involve their lives dramatically...was the strong point of the presentation. This involvement really was evident in the classes' eyes."

Six teachers answered "yes, definitely" to the question "Do you think the program is appropriate for students in grades 7-12?" The other three responded "yes, probably," and explained that they thought the material may be too advanced for seventh and eighth graders.

In response to the question, "Do you think the animation segment (balance beam) was effective?" four checked "yes, very effective," four responded "yes, sort of effective," and one answered "no, not very effective." One teacher wrote, "The animation was maybe the weakest part of the film—students maybe did not catch on to exactly what it was representing."

There were no further comments on the teacher response forms. All teachers indicated that they would recommend this program to other teachers; six would highly recommend it.

# Evaluators' Observations

Students were attentive through most of the opening minutes of Bill Moyers' first documentary sequence. Their attention lagged as the segment progressed. When the first dramatic segment began, students were once again very attentive.

In the first dramatic segment, some students snickered or commented among themselves when David kissed Maria. Also in this part, several students in one class laughed when the accident happened.

Students' attention wandered somewhat in the second documentary segment, but picked up again in the dramatization. In all classes, students were very attentive to the dramatic segments, but their attention lagged during the documentary and animation segments.

# Classroom Discussion

Some students found Bill Moyers' monologue to be boring, but others liked it. Several students in one class thought that Moyers' appearance and manner was too formal. Others thought that the presentation in these segments was very appropriate for the subject matter.

A few students laughed at the accident scene. When asked about this, they gave two reasons: the accident looked "fake," and it came as a total surprise and seemed overly dramatic.

When asked "How did you like the program?" most responses were short and noncommittal. ("It's OK." "It's all right.") But the subsequent discussion in all classes would suggest that these initial responses were affected by the fact that it took students a few minutes to feel at ease in the discussion.

The thing students liked most about the program was the drama. They liked the story and the fact that it taught them about an important issue concerning the Constitution by means of an interesting dramatization to which they could relate. Most thought the drama presented a clear and realistic example of the division of federal and state power and how this division can affect a person's life. Several students commented that they learned more about federalism from watching this program than if they had just read about it in a book.

Students in all classes said they did not like the animation part of the program. They gave various reasons. Some said the segments were too short, and hard to understand. A few said that the balance beam did not seem to be related to the rest of the program. Several high school students considered the animation part "childish" and inappropriate for a program on the Constitution.

Some students said David's reaction to the accident was totally unrealistic. They said that if they were David, they would have been a lot more depressed about not being able to walk and swim and not so concerned about whether or not they could go back to school. One student commented, "David should have sued the guy in the van instead of going back to school."

# Conclusions

Students liked the dramatic portion of the program very much—they seemed to relate well to the characters and found the story believable. While a few students thought the wheelchair example was overly dramatic, most thought it was good because it illustrated tough issues to which there are no simple answers. Students became involved in the story and wanted to know how it ended.

They were least attentive to the animation and documentary parts of the video. Some high school students thought the animation was childish and inappropriate in a program on the Constitution. Students in both junior high and senior high found the animation segments hard to understand and thought they somehow needed to be made "more clear." When asked about the documentary parts of the program, the general complaint was that "Bill Moyers is boring." It's curious that the program begins with an animated segment followed by a documentary segment, the students' two least favorites.

One of the key findings was that, after viewing the video, students were divided on who has the most power, the federal or state government. More students thought "the federal government has the most power" than that "power is shared between the federal and state governments" or that "state government has the most power." This division probably is not surprising, because different segments of the program emphasize different interpretations of federal and state power.

Teachers reacted quite positively to the program. Unlike their students, they were impressed with the documentary segments. They found Bill Moyers' presentation effective and liked the way the documentary and drama complimented each other. One teacher did not think the animated segments were effective.

Overall, teachers and students reacted positively to the Federalism program. Even though students were not enthusiastic about the documentary and animation segments, most responded that they liked the program and found it interesting. It seems that the dramatic segments are so compelling that they more than compensate for students' negative reactions to the animation and documentary segments.

## Appendix A

# Participating Schools

**Illinois**

Monticello High School, Monticello
Urbana Junior High School, Urbana
Columbia Middle School, Champaign

**Indiana**

Columbus North High School, Columbus

## *U. S. Constitution*

# Student Questionnaire

Grade Level (Circle) 7 8 9 10 11 12

Male 45% Female 54%

School _____ Date _____

| | strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The program was interesting | 15% | 76% | 5% | 2% | 1% |
| 2. The program was appealing | 14% | 60% | 20% | 5% | 0% |
| 3. I liked the program | 19% | 61% | 15% | 3% | 1% |
| 4. The story was believable | 37% | 44% | 13% | 3% | 2% |
| 5. The teenagers in the story acted naturally | 21% | 47% | 19% | 9% | 3% |
| 6. I learned something new from this program | 17% | 48% | 22% | 8% | 3% |

7. Which part of the program did you **like the most**?
   - 9% the documentary (Bill Moyers)
   - 59% the dramatization (high school swimmers)
   - 8% the animation (the balance beam)
   - 24% I liked all parts

   Why:

8. Which part of the program did you **like the least**?
   - 47% the documentary (Bill Moyers)
   - 5% the dramatization (high school swimmers)
   - 38% the animation (the balance beam)
   - 1% I disliked all parts

   Why:

9. If there is a disagreement between the federal government and a state government, who decides the issue?
   - 3% the President
   - 15% the Congress
   - 60% the Supreme Court
   - 13% the state legislature
   - 6% the governor of the state

10. What effect did the Civil War have on the power of the federal government?
    - 83% it strengthened the federal government's power
    - 10% it weakened the federal government's power
    - 6% it had no effect on the federal government's power

11. Based on the program, who do you think has the most power?
    - 39% the federal government
    - 21% the state government
    - 30% power is shared by federal and state governments
    - 9% I'm not sure what the program said about federal and state power

## Appendix C

Name:_____
Subjects Taught:_____
Years of Experience:_____

### U.S. CONSTITUTION
### TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you like the program?

__9__ yes, a lot
__0__ yes, a little
__0__ no, not very much
__0__ no, not at all

2. Do you think the program is appropriate for students in grades 7-12?

__6__ yes, definitely
__3__ yes, probably
__0__ no, probably not
__0__ no, definitely not
If not, why not?

3. Do you think the documentary segment (Bill Moyers) was effective?

__8__ yes, very effective
__1__ yes, sort of effective
__0__ no, not very effective
__0__ no, not at all effective
If no, why not?

-over-

4. Do you think the dramatic segment (high school swimmers) was effective?

__9__ yes, very effective
__0__ yes, sort of effective
__0__ no, not very effective
__0__ no, not at all effective
If no, why not?

5. Do you think the animation segment (balance beam) was effective?

__4__ yes, very effective
__4__ yes, sort of effective
__1__ no, not very effective
__0__ no, not at all effective
If no, why not?

Listed below are the expected outcomes for this program. Please indicate how well you think the program covered these expected outcomes.

6. How are powers divided and shared by the federal and state governments of the USA?

__3__ covered very well
__9__ covered
__0__ covered poorly
__0__ not covered

7. How has the division and sharing of power in the federal system changed during different periods of American history?

7 covered very well
2 covered
0 covered poorly
0 not covered

8a. What have been the major issues in history about the division and sharing of power between the national and state governments?

6 covered very well
3 covered
0 covered poorly
0 not covered

8b. How have these issues been resolved?

4 covered very well
5 covered
0 covered poorly
0 not covered

9. Would you recommend this program to other teachers?

6 yes, I would highly recommend it
3 yes, I would recommend it
0 no, I don't think I would recommend it
0 no, I would not recommend it
If no, why not?

10. Do you have any other comments about or suggestions for the program?

Thank You

## Appendix D

# Discussion Questions

1. How did you like the program?
2. What did you like the most about the program?
3. What did you like the least about the program?
4. What did you think the main idea of the program was?
5. Did you think that David and Maria's relationship was realistic?
6. What did you think of the part when David kissed Maria?
7. If you could talk to the producer, what suggestions would you make?